

# OM IN EPIGRAPHY AND NUMISMATICS

K. V. RAMAKRISHNA RAO

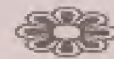
**OM** the primordial sound and its symbol in various forms have been associated with humanity, ever since its creation on the earth. In fact, it has not only been connected with the creation of the universe, but also with the speech, script and symbolism of human beings. Now, as much material about epigraphy and numismatics of ancient India and other countries are available. A study of such details brings out very interesting information about OM.



Those who are familiar with Vedic hymns and their recitation, know the significance of the vibration of the monosyllable OM. In the beginning, definitely, there was only word and then only man started to write the spoken word. In the case of OM, the importance is that it has been represented in various forms or such representation used shows the



ओ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात् पूर्णमुदच्यते ।  
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥

"OM. The invisible is the whole, the visible is the whole. From the whole, the visible universe has come out. The whole remains ever itself even though the infinite universe has come out of it."

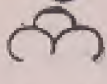

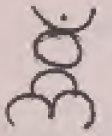

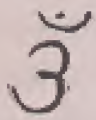

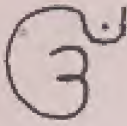

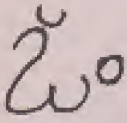
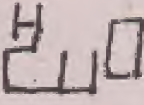
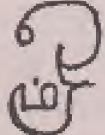
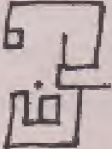
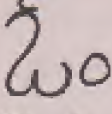
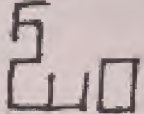
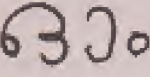

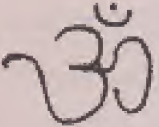
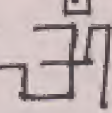
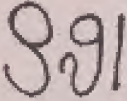
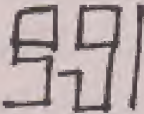
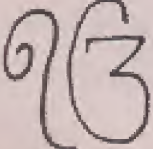
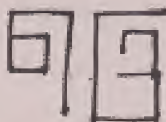
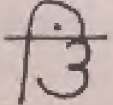



The derivation of 'Amen' from OM has been accepted by many scholars. Surprisingly, the Arabic Amen  closely resembles . Definitely, it is not a mere coincidence that these two letters of Arabic and Sanskrit denote the same meaning and AUM and ALM also signify the creation of the Universe. Thus, the study of OM not only reveals the unity of world religions, but also proves the fact that all scripts evolved out of a common script which perhaps existed once throughout the world.

THE AUTHOR.





evolution of OM itself from time  
immemorial.


	Vedic	
	Pauranic	
	Assamiya and Bangla	
	Oriya	
	Telugu	
	Tamil	
	Kannada	
	Malayalam	
	Marathi	
	Sindhi	
	Gurmukhi	
	Sartha	

Before going deep into such a study, let us be familiarised with the following representation of OM in various scripts:

For an understanding, the respective letter in each script has been converted into segmented form. The human tendency is to represent any word in short form that is very often used. It changes according to the surface used for writing or inscribing. Thus, a letter written or inscribed on the material medium like paper, cloth, clay-tablet, copper plate, stone, etc., appears characteristically depending upon the material surface used. But, the important feature signifying its subtle inner meaning is always retained. Archaeologists and epigraphists may even opine that such forms are the initial stages of the evolution of writing by human beings. The noted epigraphist, Dr Dinesh Chandra Sircar, long back pointed out the possibility of the identification of certain symbols appearing at the beginning of many inscriptions with OM. Al-beruni, a non-Hindu, in his work interprets it as OM. Therefore, it is evident that in the 11th century itself the symbolism of OM was very familiar in India and abroad.

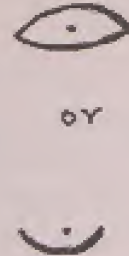
The practice of Tamils to start writing with '**Pillaiyar Suzhi**'  is evident from many palm-leaf manuscripts and inscriptions. Why the symbol  known as '**Pillaiyar Suzhi**', i.e., the 'curve' is associated with Ganesha is very significant, as such curved symbols in inscriptions not only represent OM, but also prove the connection with Ganesha. Indeed OM or Pranava itself is the symbolic representation of Ganesha. The bent trunk, thus explains the connection. Another interesting episode is the writing down of the Mahabharat by Ganesha himself! It clearly proves the relation



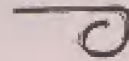
between sound and matter or speech and writing. Various forms and images of Ganesha have been found in different countries like Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Nepal, Cambodia, Java, Bali, China, Japan, etc. If the outline of such images is drawn with the characteristic bent trunk, they exactly coincide with the various letters of scripts representing OM as shown above. Particularly, the Tamil OM exactly coincides with the figure of Ganesha. Thus, while explaining the tattva of the figure Ganesha, it is pointed out that in whatever language the letter OM is written, the common characteristics among them is the resemblance of the respective letter with the elephant ears, head and trunk. Ganesha with the elephant features is known as Omkarmurti. The symbol  is known as 'Chandra Bindhu' and it is in common use in northern India as 'Pillaiyar Suzhi' is in southern India.

The inscriptions, copper plates, palm-leaves, ceramic and other surfaces invariably start with OM, Sri, Swasti, Siddham, Subasri, Subamastu, etc. but represented by symbols which resemble very close together. From the frequency of occurrence of Sri, OM and Siddham at the beginning of the inscriptions, some scholars opine that OM may be having the nature of Sri and Siddham, as its character lies in-between them as can be seen below from the inscriptional details. The name of the inscription, period or date, the word with which it starts, script in which it has been inscribed and reference are given in order with the symbol on the left hand side.

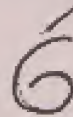
1. Two image inscriptions from Mathura (1 plate).



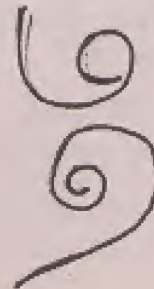
2.



3.



4.



171-72 A.D. Sanskrit (with a slight influence of Prakrit).

**Siddham** — expressed by a symbol which looks like the one found in another Mathura inscription of the fourth year of Kanishka (Vol.34, plate facing p.10).

Epigraphica Indica (Hereafter mentioned as EI), vol.37, p.IV., oct.1967.

Two **Maltraka** characters - copper plate.

526-7A.D. - Sanskrit. — Devanagari.

**Siddham** - plate facing p.169, Ibid.

**Vrajam** plates of Indravarman — II.

Copper plate—Oct.23, 595 A.D. - Sanskrit.

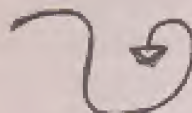
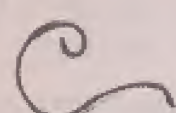
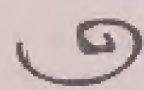
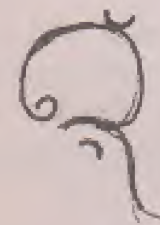
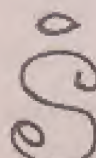
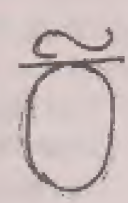
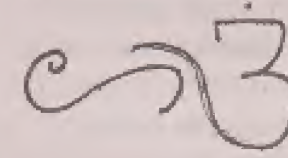
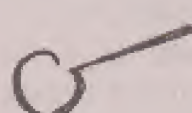
**Siddham /Svasti/ (Siddham expressed by a symbol and Svasti in Devanagari) - Ibid.**

Four Buddhist inscriptions from Phohnarkalan.

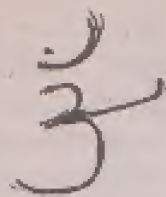
Sanskrit - 6th cent.A.D.

**Siddham** (spiral symbol) —Inscription B.



5.  **Siddham** (facing p.149) - Inscription C  
EI, vol.37, p.III, July 1967.  
Mahua inscription of Vatsaraja—latter half of the eighth cent. A.D.—Sanskrit (plate facing p.55)  
**Siddham** (expressed by a symbol).  
EI, vol.37, p.II, pp.54-55, April 1967.
6.  **Siddham** (facing p.149) - Inscription C  
EI, vol.37, p.III, July 1967.  
Mahua inscription of Vatsaraja—latter half of the eighth cent. A.D.—Sanskrit (plate facing p.55)  
**Siddham** (expressed by a symbol).  
EI, vol.37, p.II, pp.54-55, April 1967.
7.  A stone inscription from Kudarkot (Gavidhumat).  
588-89 A.D. - Sanskrit - Devanagari, Ibid.  
Om expressed by a symbol.  
EI, vol.I, 1892.
8.  Pehoa Prasasti of the reign of Mahendrapala.  
**OM Namo Madhava** - Sanskrit - Devanagari.  
882-917 A.D. - plate facing p.244, Ibid.
9.  Pattanlandi plates of Silahara Avasara -(II).
10.  Ekallahara grant of Trilochanapala, Saka 972.  
Copper plate - 1051 A.D. - **OM** expressed by a symbol.  
Plate facing p.16, EI, vol.36, Jan.1965.
11.  Brilhari Chedi inscription.  
Sanskrit - Devanagari - 11th cent.A.D.  
**OM OM** namasivaya—here OM is represented by a symbol and as well as by letter.  
EI, vol.I, 1892.
12.  Yadava charter from Devalali - 1 plate.  
copper plate - 11th cent.A.D. - Sanskrit Siddham/ Svasti/ (Siddham expressed by a symbol and Svasti in Nagari) - plate facing p.80.  
EI, vol. 37,p.II, April 1967.

13.

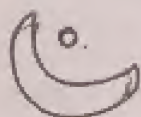


Prakasa inscription of Sirihana's time-Saka 1156. 1233-34 A.D.

**Om /Svasti/** (Om is represented by the usual OM symbol and Svasti in Nagari) - plate facing p.21.

El. vol 36, p. I, Jan. 1965.

14.



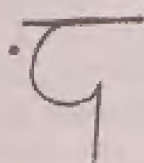
Chahamana inscription of Vikrama—1189 (Oct.16, 1132 A.D.).

White marble pillar-Sanskrit.

**Siddham**--expressed by a symbol, plate facing p.164.

El. vol. 37,p.IV, Oct.1967.

15.



Mahul (Trombay inscription of Haripaladeva).

Saka 1075-July 7,1153 A.D.

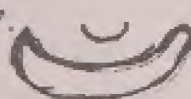
Sanskrit stone inscription.

**OM** (symbol) / **Svasti/** (Nagari)-ibid.

16.

*Menal inscription of the Chahamana Prince Meghanada Vikrama 1312-Aug.16,1255 A.D.*

17.



**OM** (symbol) **Svasti** (Nagari)-the OM symbol has been damaged, Ibid. plate facing -158.

Daddala inscription has '**Chandra Bindu**' like symbol at the top and starts with '**Svasti**'. Sanskrit-in Kannada-Dec.24, 1069 A.D.

Plate facing p.115, El. vol.37, p.III, July 1967.

18.



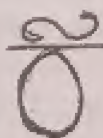
Agali grant of Ganga Sripurusha.

Saka 669-Jan.18, 748 A.D.

OM Svasti (OM by symbol and Svasti in Nagari)

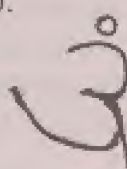
Plate facing p.134, Ibid.

19.



Inscriptions of rulers of Gaya start with this symbol. Also see 10 of this list.

20.



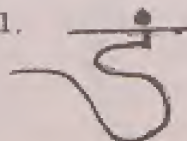
Inscription from Khajuraho.

Plate facing p.160.

OM by usual symbol.

El. vol.I,1892.

21.



The Dewal Prasasti of Lalla the Chhinda.

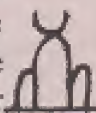
Plate facing p.76, Ibid.



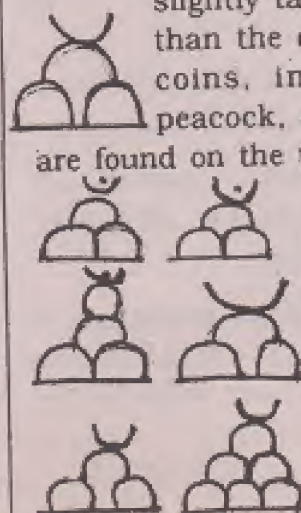
From the above, it can easily be seen how OM has been represented symbolically and it tallies with the other scriptural representations. '**Chandra Bindhu**' appears in 1,13,14,17 and 18. Curved symbols appear in 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,12 and 15. The symbol 8 resembles Tamil OM. In 11,13,20 and 21 OM appears very clearly. The symbol 13 may be noted carefully, where the normal characteristics of Devanagari OM is somewhat disarranged, but this form appears on many ancient coins of India. Clockwise and anti-clockwise curves may also be noted, as in many figures, the trunk of Ganesha has been characteristically drawn in either way, perhaps, according to the wish of the artist. But, each symbol has its own significance, and it is explained in the **Vinayaka Puranam**. In any case, here, it is evident that OM is not only represented by its usual symbol, but also by shorter curved forms. As the concept of Ganapati or Ganesha is traced back to Rigveda, the moment the Vedas were available in written form, the symbolic representation or its monosyllable must have come into vogue at that time itself. It is also significant to note that 'OM' or 'Omkar' as a mystic symbol, associated with the creation was known in the ancient world including North and South Americas, China, Tibet, Japan, Mongolla and other countries. Now, let us turn our attention to numismatics.

The Vedic and Pauranic representation of OM and the Chandra Bindhu symbol are found on many punch-marked silver and copper coins of ancient India. The British scholars have interpreted this symbol as a mountain, three curved mountain peaks with the moon on the top.

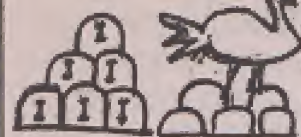
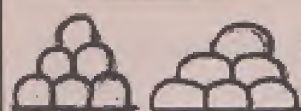
stupa or caitya, reliquary and so on. Discussing this symbol, John Allan points out that one of the commoner symbols on the punch-marked coins, and the one which can really be said to be common on other series also, is that which represents a mountain. In the footnote, he mentions about the evidence for this identification, i.e., it is not a stupa or '**caitya**', as has been summed up by Ananda Coomaraswamy. Theobald suggests that they are reliquaries, one in each chamber of a stupa. As the same object is found in many other combinations, usually with the 'taurine' symbol, where it can hardly be a reliquary, John Allan argues that it is a mountain. Alexander Cunningham opines that it is a Buddhist "**caitya**", the object of worship. Parame-shwarilal Gupta describes it as 'three curved mountain peaks with the moon on the top'. Following these scholars, other Indian scholars interpret that it must be the mountain 'meru'.

A careful examination of such coins with the symbol shows that the form used for the obverse is never exactly identical with the one used on the reverse, i.e., for example, in one coin, where the reverse is made slightly taller and thinner 


than the obverse. In some other coins, instead of the moon, peacock, dog or jackal and tree are found on the top, with one mountain curve missing. Of course, in these coins, there are five mountain curves, instead of three. In this study, only coins with three curves are taken into consideration. First,







the coins with 'Chandra Bindhu' are discussed and then, the above popular category is considered. A rectangular copper coin (uninscribed) with a 'crescent on a hill' was recovered from phase II of the excavated trench at Sonkh, Mathura District (p.41-42, Indian Archaeology-A

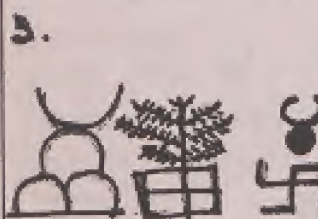
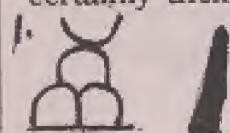
Review, 1966-67). On the beads obtained there, the symbol  is found. In south Indian coins, the symbol is

found along with  and . The

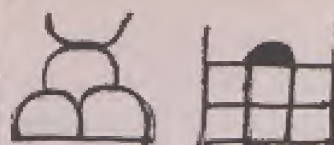
main type is a bull surrounded by a border of these symbols or ornaments, but certainly their significance is different, as

has been observed in this study. Wherever, it is used at the top of the coins, its significance can be compared with that of the inscriptions.

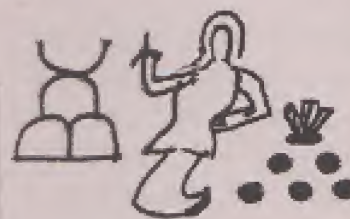
Coming to the other category, it is noted that the symbol is mostly found in the coins of Taxila, Andhras, Western Satraps, Maghad and a few other north Indian early kingdoms. This symbol app-



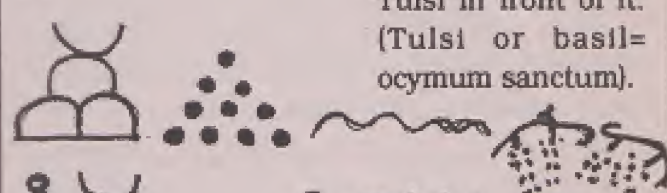
5



6.



7.



8.



Fig.3: by a plant in railing, svastika and taurine symbol (taurus=bull). As a tree, svastika and bull are in front of it. These combinations suggest a deity in a temple. Therefore, definitely, the symbol should have been used to denote some divinity.

9.



Fig.4: by a river symbol and the plan of the courtyard of a monastery with cells around and a stupa in the centre. John Allan gives this interpretation, perhaps

ears to be characteristic of Taxila, as it is invariably found in most of Taxila coins, alone or with other symbols as explained below: In figure-1, it is accompanied by a monolith. P.L. Gupta considers the accompanied symbol as a conical metallic piece.

Fig.2: by a tree in railing. If the symbol is treated to be sacred, then, the tree or plant may be considered as a Tulsi in front of it. (Tulsi or basil= ocymum sanctum).



keeping '**caltya**' in his mind, even though, he considers it as a mountain!

Fig.5: by a plan of a monastery with a stupa at its centre or front precincts of a temple with a flag mast.

Fig.6: From the figure, it is very clear that a female stands holding a flower in her right hand. The pile of six balls, apparently with flames at the top may represent an altar or sacrificial fire or a homa-Kunda (oblatory pit).

Fig.7: Though there are ten balls most of the scholars mention as nine balls and consider that it may be another way of representing a mountain. But, they may also represent the **Navagrahas** inside a temple as river and orchid symbols follow.



Fig.8: Besides, the nine balls or the **Navagrahas** and river, the **svastika** symbol is there. All these coins belong to second century B.C. In some other coins, the Taxila symbol appears in combination with a lion, elephant and so on.





Fig.9: Perhaps, this figure solves the riddle of symbolism, as here a female figure clearly stands before the symbol with folded hands, proving that it must be a deity. The six or seven stones may represent Goddesses and the taurine symbol 'bull'. This combination again gives the picture of a temple. As only the female figure is represented, the God represented by the symbol may be the God of procreation or Omkarmurti. The entire old world considered this mystic symbol as the union of the male and the female signifying creation. The Tantric interpretation of OM is that it is capable of freeing the Jiva or soul from the bondage of birth and death. There are coins

available with the name Sri Somakadevi, supposed to be the wife of the Sakambhari King, Ajayadeva, found in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh belonging to the post-Gupta period. On the reverse of the coins the expression 'Sri OM' or 'Sri Omkara' is found very clearly. It is said that the coins were issued in the name of a God 'Omkara Mantata'. There is a magnificent temple built in the name of this God at Mantata near Indore. People believe that childless couples who worship the deity would bear a child.

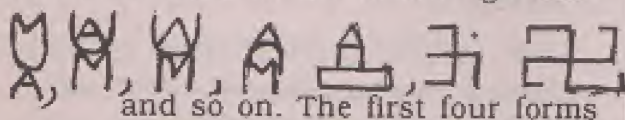
In this context, the connection between AUM, ALM and Elohim may be considered here, as it has a direct bearing on the above discussion. ॐ, AUM consists of three letters अ उ म and these by Manduky are made the modal expressions of the first cause, the means of the self development of the Divine along the three planes of **vyavahara**, **pratibhasa** and **paramartha**. अ represents **jagrat**, the 'wakeful' phase; उ **svapna**, the 'dreaming'; and म **sushupti**, the 'slumbering'. The first verse of the second **sura** of the Koran consists of only three letters-ALM! Islamic scholars say they are the three Arabic letters Alif, Lam and Mim. Opinions differ as to their significance, the prevalent view being that they indicate some mystic words. Thus, the mystic word ALM, which prophet Mohammed prefixed to many chapters of the Koran, alludes to Mother Goddess or Mother of Gods. H.P.Blavatsky explains how the word Elohim is formed by adding a masculine plural ending 'im' to the feminine noun 'Eloah', ALH and represents the Male-Female Creative Gods or Hierarchies of Beings who bring a



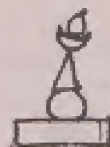
Universe into being. The derivation of 'Amen' from OM has been accepted by many scholars. Surprisingly, the Arabic Amen  closely resembles . Definitely, it is not a mere coincidence that these two letters of Arabic and Sanskrit denote the same meaning and AUM' and ALM also signify the creation of the Universe. Thus, the study of OM not only reveals the unity of world religions, but also proves the fact that all scripts evolved out of a common script which perhaps existed once throughout the world.

The next question arises as to how the symbol  should turn to 90° clockwise to represent the present Devanagari ? Those who are familiar with tantric texts know! how the symbol is turned in different directions or even upside down to interpret various concepts. Tantric scholars say, if the symbol of  is turned around,  it represents the pose of prayer, i.e., a person with uplifted hands. The other interpretations are beyond the scope of this paper. The point that is stressed here is, that the evolution of the symbol also proves the evolution of the script on the earth.

On the ancient ceramic ware also, the symbol is used in the following forms



are nothing but the Roman 'AUM'; written in different ways: the fifth is similar to



which exactly represents Ganesha; the sixth is the segmental form of OM and the last one is extended svastika, another form of OM. Dr Feteh Singh, former Director of Rajasthan

Prachya Vidh-ya Pratisthan,

Jodhpur, argues that an

Indus Valley seal depicting a

tree of life incorporates OM in

its iconographic represen-

tation. According to him, the central

portion of the seal represents OM with the

combination of letters O and M, the former

placed on the latter to symbolise the

evolution of life or the tree of life.

The Bhagavat Gita uses different expressions in place of **akshara**, such as **prakrti**, **para prakrti**, **mahad brahman**, **ksetra**, **yoni**, **avyakta**, **brahman** and **atman**. Of course, it is too well-known to be repeated here that Krishna proclaims, "**Aham asmi ekam aksaram**" (I am the monosyllable OM). How true it is to note that the study of OM in epigraphy and numismatics also brings out the facts of the Gita or rather follows the Gita to arrive at truth.

OM TAT SAT.

